

taking one moment to buckle-up could make a life-or-death difference to the thousands who needlessly die on our roadways every year.

For those lucky enough to survive a devastating auto crash, the health care costs can be staggering. On average, hospitalization costs for unbelted traffic crash victims are 50 percent higher than for those who buckled-up. The needless deaths and injuries that result from not wearing seat belts cost society an estimated \$26 billion annually in medical care, lost productivity and other injury-related costs.

These deplorable statistics are reversible. We can significantly reduce deaths and serious injuries from motor-vehicle crashes by enforcing seat belt use nationwide through a primary enforcement law like the one Senator Warner is now proposing.

In my home state of Michigan, a primary enforcement law has been in effect for three years. In that time, nearly 200 lives have been saved, and over 1,000 serious collisions have been averted because of this change in the law.

As a physician, it is a rare blessing to be in a situation where we can easily identify the solution to a public health threat. Passage of the primary enforcement seat belt law will save lives. It's that simple.

RON DAVIS,
AMA Trustee.

VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION
OF CHIEFS OF POLICE,
Richmond, VA, February 9, 2004.

The Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police (VACP) endorses S. 1993, a bill to create incentives for the states to enact primary safety belt laws. In 2002 in Virginia, we had 913 automobile fatalities. Of those 913 fatalities, 438 (62.7%) were not wearing a safety belt. In those 913 fatality crashes, 9,912 injuries were sustained by unbuckled occupants.

Under our current secondary enforcement law, Virginia's front seat safety belt use is 74.6%, which includes drivers and front seat passengers. Research tells us that front seat occupants of vehicles involved in potentially fatal crashes in states with primary safety belt laws have a 15 percentage point higher belt use than persons in states without primary laws.

The VACP supports the passage of primary safety belt laws as a proven tool to increase safety belt usage and reduce serious injuries and fatalities in the event of a traffic crash. Public education and enhanced traffic enforcement efforts have failed to increase Virginia's safety belt usage rate much beyond 75%. States with primary safety belt laws consistently experience safety belt usage rates up to 90%. The VACP believes that the passage of a primary safety belt law in Virginia will increase belt usage and save the lives of countless Virginians.

DANA G. SCHRAD,
Executive Director,
Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police.

EXHIBIT 1

THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION,
Washington, DC, November 12, 2003.

Hon. JAMES INHOFE,
Chairman, Committee on Environment and Public Works, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: With almost 43,000 people dying every year on our nation's highways, it is imperative that we do everything in our power to promote a safer transportation system. The Bush Administration's proposal to reauthorize surface transportation programs, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003 (SAFETEA), offers several bold and innovative approaches to address this crisis.

President Bush and I believe that increasing safety belt usage rates is the single most effective means to decrease highway fatalities and injuries. As a result, SAFETEA's new core highway safety program provides States with powerful funding incentives to increase the percentage of Americans who buckle up every time they get in an automobile. Every percentage point increase in the national safety belt usage rate saves hundreds of lives and millions of dollars in lost productivity.

Empirical evidence shows that the surest way for a State to increase safety belt usage is through the passage of a primary safety belt law. States with primary belt laws have safety belt usage rates that are on average eight percentage points higher than States with secondary laws. Recognizing that States may have other innovative methods to achieve higher rates of belt use, SAFETEA also rewards States that achieve 90% safety belt usage rates even if a primary safety belt law is not enacted. I urge you to consider these approaches as your Committee marks up reauthorization legislation.

While safety belts are obviously critical to reducing highway fatalities, so too is a data driven approach to providing safety. Every State faces its own unique safety challenges, and every State must be given broad funding flexibility to solve those challenges. This is a central theme of SAFETEA, which aims to provide States the ability to use scarce resources to meet their own highest priority needs. Such flexibility is essential for States to maximize their resources, including the funds available under a new core highway safety program.

I look forward to working with you on these critically important safety issues as development of a surface transportation reauthorization bill progresses.

Sincerely yours,
NORMAN Y. MINETA.

Mr. WARNER. I am pleased to say Senator MURRAY has asked to join as a cosponsor and I so request that be noted on the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

"WE THE PEOPLE . . ." PROGRAM

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, more than 1200 high school students from across the Nation will come to our Nation's capital this summer to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the history and philosophy of our Nation's most important documents: the Con-

stitution and Bill of Rights. These ambitious students will be participating in the annual national competition of "We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution." This laudable effort, which is federally funded, is the most extensive educational program in the country designed specifically to educate young people about the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. At a time when a study by the National Association of Educational Progress shows that three-quarters of America's students are not proficient in either American history or civics, the importance of this program is unquestionable.

"We the People . . ." helps our students not only appreciate our constitutional democracy, but it allows them to "participate" in it. Students start with an instructional program where they learn about our Government's primary institutions while they discover the relevance of our Constitution and Bill of Rights to their daily lives. Their lessons then simulate real-life when the students participate in a "Congressional hearing" where they "testify" before a panel of judges. By using the principles and knowledge they've learned in the classroom to role play, these students have the opportunity to delve into and appreciate both historical and contemporary issues facing our Nation.

This program is not just reserved for high school students. "We the People . . ." recognizes that civic education should not wait until the students are almost able to vote. Teachers are encouraged to engage their students in simulated hearings at the elementary and middle school levels. In fact, more than 24 million students and 75,000 educators have participated in the "We the People" program since its inception in 1987. Throughout the years, several of my staff members have served as judges in the State competition.

This year, I am proud to inform the Senate that East Grand Rapids High School will represent Michigan in this prestigious event. These students demonstrated their exceptional command of issues relating to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights in the state competition held in Lansing.

The "We the People . . ." program continues to be one of the best efforts to counteract the feelings of political apathy and cynicism amongst our Nation's youth. I wish the students at East Grand Rapids and all the students across the Nation who will be competing in this year's competition the best of luck. I know my colleagues will join me in recognizing the contributions the "We the People . . ." program has provided to students across the country.

CELEBRATING AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH

Mr. SARBANES. Mr. President, I am pleased to join in commemorating African-American History Month and in